

VZCZCXRO5226
RR RUEHLN RUEHVK RUEHYG
DE RUEHDBU #1931 2930558
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 200558Z OCT 06
FM AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL 1827
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 1869
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 1876
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 1843
RUEHDBU/AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE 0335

UNCLAS DUSHANBE 001931

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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [ECON](#) [EAID](#) [ENGR](#) [ETRD](#) [TI](#)

SUBJECT: DESPITE THE CHAMPAGNE, NOT MUCH TO CELEBRATE IN TAJIKISTAN'S
"NEW CITY"

1. (U) INTRODUCTION: During an October 17 visit to Shahrinai -- Persian for "New City" -- PolOffs found nothing new in tours of a wineless winery, a school with no electricity and talks with local government officials. The district, located 25 kilometers east of Dushanbe and 25 km west of the Uzbek border, has some functioning Soviet-era industries, including the winery, a flour mill and canning factory. District Chairman Pulotov reported problems with limited electricity, transporting goods over the Uzbek border and the lack of needed construction supplies. On the election front, the Tajik government told District Election Commission Headquarters not to interfere in upcoming elections, according to Chairman Ganjev, who insisted that upcoming elections would be free of corruption. END INTRODUCTION.

2. (U) Shahrinai currently gets only 10-12 hours of electricity a day, from approximately 3 - 8 a.m., and from 4 - 10 pm, which is not enough to support the regular production of wine at the local wine and spirits plant. When the electricity works, the winery produces 10,000 deciliters of wine annually, 2000 dc of champagne and 10,000 deciliters of vodka for the domestic market. Starting in October, this electricity supply becomes even more limited and remains so throughout the winter. Most of its 157 employees (compared to 850 in the Soviet heydays) spend their down-time picking cotton to earn extra money while the electricity is off. When the production line is hot, most of its products do not have great market appeal, as wine is not a competitive product in vodka-loving Tajikistan, and exporting via the Uzbek border is severely limited. During the Soviet era, Tajikistan products ranked alongside Moldovan and Georgian in terms of quality, but Uzbekistan is no longer a big market for Tajik wine and champagne due to chilly bilateral relations. In addition, the area still suffers from the Gorbachev-era destruction of vineyards in an effort to combat alcoholism in the USSR. The domestic market for Tajik champagne, however, is on the rise according to Deputy Director Sattor Muminov, who hopes that times will be better when problems are resolved with Uzbekistan and trade is freed up.

3. (U) Students are not picking cotton instead of going to school this season -- a change from years past thanks to a decree from President Rahmonov forbidding the practice. In classrooms full of Lenin busts, we found a lot of bright students with dim futures. The school has no electricity or heat in the winter. A school director told PolOffs her 1500 students "got used to the cold." Each classroom had a coal heater, but the radiator system in the cement building hadn't worked for years. The IT classroom was filled of computers still in the boxes, with nothing to power them and no internet to access. In fact, very few of the students in this school had ever heard of the internet.

14. (U) In between calls from local businesses asking why the lights were already off at noon in October, District Chairman Rahmatullo Pulotov told us of problems related to the Uzbek border and lack of construction supplies in the region. It is difficult to get supplies in and out due to the Uzbeks' insistence on keeping the border tightly shut. Even family members have difficulty getting to the funerals of their loved ones across the border, according to Pulotov.

15. (U) On the election front, Chairman Ganjev of the District Election Commission Headquarters assured us that upcoming elections would be free of corruption, noting he had been instructed multiple times, from multiple authorities not to permit any government interference in the election. "We didn't get that instruction (during the parliamentary elections) in February 2005," he admitted. Despite an office full of Rahmonov propaganda posters, the facility does have posters of each of the five candidates, though they are printed only in Tajik, ignoring the Uzbek and Tartar voting class. Had any of the candidates come to Shahrinaw to campaign? "Not yet," he said, "but they will," he was confident.

16. (U) COMMENT: Much has changed for the worse since the Soviet era in this region. Wine is just one product suffering from the lack of infrastructure, and the government is not offering any solutions to the electricity problem. Whether free and fair or not, Rahmonov is expected to win the election bringing another seven years of more of the same. Keeping the children in the classroom (albeit a chilly and dark one) and instructing the local government not to interfere in elections are just small steps in the right direction for this nation that seems to lament the "glory days" of the Soviet era, when at least its industries were employing people and its children were being educated. END COMMENT.

JACOBSON